

'A Fair Sex'

1965–1971

“However, although they have yet to find winning form, there is much to enthuse about in the number of girls who turn out regularly to train. The club is young and immediate success is hardly likely.”

- T.C.D. Miscellany, April 30th 1965.

An enthusiastic viewpoint presented to the “college goers” of the swinging 60s on the formation of only the third womens athletic club in the Republic, that of Trinity College, Dublin. On month later, College Park was the setting for “one of the greatest occasions in Trinity athletics” — victory over U.C.D. by both men and women.

“The women were victorious in their first ever Colours match, walking over a pathetic U.C.D. team with maximum points.”

After losing their first two matches versus Clonliffe and Crusaders respectively, the newly formed womens athletic club, under the leadership of Lil Cranly, it's first captain, had recorded it's first team victory. Womens athletics had begun to take a foothold in college its aim now would be to establish for itself a niche in college sport, in a similar fashion to that already held by clubs such as the womens hockey club and the lawn tennis club.

The formation of the womens athletic club opened up an entirely new arena of sport to women in college, one of dual function, in which they could assert themselves as individuals as well as part of a team. Now the ladies of college had a chance to expend their energies into new channels, to follow the standards set by the earlier female Olympians, the most recent at the time being Wilma Rudolph Treble (100, 200, relay) in Rome in 1960 and the victories of the British pair, Ann Packer (800 m.) and Mary Rand (long jump) at the 1964 Tokyo Games. Above all, they now had a new field in which they could attain esteem and prestige both for themselves and their college.

Why however had it taken until 1965 to establish a womens athletic club in college? After all, today we seldom find an athletic club that does not cater for both men and

women. Then again, we are living the the world of the eighties, a world in which the position of women is “slightly” better than that of her predecessors. She is now more at one with her male counterparts than ever before, not only in relation to academic matters but also in the wide spectrum of sport. In years previous to 1965, the involvement of women in college athletics was very limited. One does find snippets concerning women being totally daring, by revealing a slight patch of leg, as early as 1932!

“The women harriers, moreover, have shown that public opinion is far enough advanced to see nothing immodest in women wearing shorts.”

- T.C.D. Miscellany, 1932

However, such adventurous females were few and far between and there was certainly never any mention of women competing or even training for that matter on an organised level. Female involvement in athletics rarely extended beyond preparing and distributing sandwiches for the “aftermath” of certain race meetings. Such a job, frowned upon by many today, was considered a great honour. Indeed, it opened up a new social scene for the ladies of college, a chance to meet their sporting heroes, vital introductions could be attained, which could for many either “make or break” their college year. As Serina Bitchell advised in her article, “Advice to young ladies in college”, T.C.D. Miscellany, 27th November 1964 regarding sport:

“Avoid taking part in the more hearty ones (obvious really). If you’re making club teas, turn up late so that you need only hand round someone else’s delicious sandwiches. Use these occasions to meet a Knight of the Campanile — an essential accessory if you’re to attend the College Races in style.”

Although it had taken quite a period of time for Irish women to show a full interest in athletics, after all women had first competed in the Olympics as far back as 1928, once the seeds of a club had first been sown, it wasn’t long before it had taken root and both the club and women’s athletics in general became established in the country as a whole.

Going back to the day it all began — 14th April 1965 — a rainy day in College Park, something we all relate to be it ’65 or ’85, the first time women ran on an organised basis in college. The event — the trials for the Womens Track team. The first high jump had to be abandoned due to the treacherous conditions however, on the whole were encouraging and a foundation for a womens track team had been laid down.

Five days later, on 19th April, Lil Ganly won the first womens pentathlon in college, with a total of 2,730 points. The first track match versus Clonliffe Harriers was totally chaotic — obviously the sight of the shapely female legs, clad only in shorts, was too

much to handle for some of the eager supporters!! In the first colours match, J. Patterson won the 110 yards (12.5 seconds), B. Cooke took the long jump with a leap of 15'8" and the 4x100 squad took the relay in fine style. The 102nd College Races that summer saw O. Meagher take the 110 yards in 12.7 seconds followed closely by Ms. Patterson (12.8) and Ms. Byrne (12.8). At the same meeting, the Ladies Invitation 110 yards was won by Maeve Lyll, of Olympian fame.

The '65 season closed with the customary A.G.M. During the proceedings, that well-established and highly esteemed figure in college sport, Mr. Shillington, Captain of the Mens Squad of the same year, proposed that the Womens section should:

- a) Be called "Dublin University Womens Athletic Club".
- b) Remain a sub-section of D.U.H.A.C.

His motion was passed unanimously.

The ladies section was later to break away on their own.

The following season saw the womens athletic team progressing steadily. Again Ms. Ganly and Ms. Cooke were very much to the fore, both winning in College Races — Ganly taking the 110 yards in 12.1 seconds and Cooke the 220 yards in 28 seconds. As yet however, a full fixture list for womens participation had not been attained.

The 1967 season saw no outstanding breakthroughs. In a match versus Queens, there were no Trinity winners, although Ms. Patterson came very close when finishing second in the 220 yards in a time of 28.8 seconds.

College Park was the venue for the first Intervarsities for Women — the date, May 1968. Competition was keen and fierce, each individual female athlete giving her all for the good of her college and undoubtedly great personal satisfaction. Individual Trinity victories on the day were recorded by C. O'Neill in the 220 yards (29 seconds), P. Pijeot, 80 metres hurdles (15.5 seconds) and by the 440 relay teams with a time of 56.1 seconds. Under the guidance of team captain Mary Kirby, the Trinity ladies team finished third behind the powerful sides of U.C.D. and Queens. However, it wasn't long before the power of these two teams would be crushed by the strength of a new look Trinity Ladies Athletics team which was all the time building up with the entrance of new eager, enthusiastic and energetic freshers to college. Good performance by Trinity women was scored at College Races at the end of the same month, J. Grace and J. McNicholl being particularly impressive. This was in fact the beginning of the Jane McNicholl era in college athletics. Little did the spectators at College Park that day realise that they were witnessing in action a woman who for the next five years in succession was to win the womens Intervarsity cross country title, as she took the 880 yards title in a time of 2.33. At the same meet, P. Wilson was victorious in the long jump with a leap of 15'9".

The following summer, that of 1970, Ms. McNicholl recorded an 800/1500 metres double at the Irish Universities Championships, with times of 2:20 and 5:09 respectively



Figure 14: D.U.H.A.C. womens team in 1972, having won the Intervarsity Championships without losing a single track event.

Back Row (l-r): Patricia Moran, Caroline Fitzgerald, Janet Grainger

Front Row (l-r): Patricia Wilson, Jane McNichol, Judy Page, Maria Murphy.

— a tremendous achievement, considering both finals were held within a few hours of one another.

Going into the track season of 1971, Trinity ladies already had one title at Intervarsity level behind them for that year — that of Jane McNicholl who had fought hard over talented opposition, while on her way to claiming her third Intervarsity cross country title. The team, led by captain Alison Hill, rallied together some great team spirit and succeeded in beating U.C.D. in the annual colours match. New stars were emerging. Patricia Wilson recorded a fine treble with victories in the 200 metres, 400 metres and long jump, N. Adjun was an impressive winner of the 100 metres, J. Paje putted the shot 26'3" to score maximum points in her event and of the course, there was Ms. McNicholl's victory in the 880 yards.

Cork was the setting for the 1971 Intervarsities — U.C.C. being the ever enthusiastic hosts. The Trinity team, definitely lacking the determination and fiery spirit that had lifted them to much success earlier in the season, failed to impress. Only two individual victories were scored, those of McNicholl (400 metres) and P. Wilson (100 metres). These individual victories along with the impressive performance of Ms. Paje in the discus, earned the three Trinity ladies their places on the first ever Irish Universities Selection Athletic team. The team comprising of many of the individual victors at the Cork Championship had its one and only match versus a B.L.E. selection in College Park. The event was held as part of the traditional College Races during Trinity week of 1971. This was in fact the first time that there was a full compliment of womens events on the programme. The event proved to be highly entertaining and tremendously competitive. The B.L.E. team did, however, emerge as distinct victors on this occasion.

1972–1978

1972 was an excellent year — not only for wine but also for the Trinity College ladies athletics club.

The year took off with a bang when the captain Jane McNicholl won the cross country title at Lady Dixons Park. She ran consistently and won both the 800 metres and 1500 metres at the Intervarsities held in Santry. Trinity won the Intervarsity title by a massive 104 points to U.C.D. who came second with only 42 points and showed a tremendous performance in both track and field events. All three sprints, 100, 200 and 400 metres were taken in style by Patricia Moran — this was her first year competing for college in the Intervarsities and she was certainly making a name for herself which she continued to live up to in subsequent years. Moran helped her team to come home first in the 4 x 100 metres relay, Patricia Wilson jumped a winning 4.67 metres in the long jump and came first in the 100 metres hurdles. Janet Grainger added the high jump to Trinity's long list of successes of the first 1972 Intervarsities.

A Galway athlete, Jean Folan was placed second in the 800 metres and 400 metres at this event. Jean was an undergraduate at U.C.G. and then joined Trinity where she was to fill her life with further study, lecturing in the anatomy department, and serious running. Finding Jean with time to spare was not easy. However, she ran brilliantly for Trinity adding strength to the team in future years. She has recently accepted a new post in U.C.D. (1985) but I am sure her contact with Trinity athletes will remain as strong as ever.

Also in 1972, an Irish universities team was sent to Glasgow to compete in a triangle between Scottish and British universities. The Irish ladies team had three Trinity representatives. They were Jane McNicholl, Patricia Wilson and Judy Page. Jean Folan was also in the team although still connected to U.C.G. at this point and was a great asset to the team's success.

Colours match in College Park 1973 — T.C.D. v U.C.D. The reports were in Trinity's favour:

"The home team were still on top in the womens section which T.C.D. won by 20 points. The feature here was magnificent sprinting by Patricia Moran who took the 100 and 200 metres in dashing style and was the key figure in T.C.D.'s relay win" — Irish Times, May 1973. This period proved to be another successful year for the Trinity ladies who won the 'double' in College Park when the colours match was run in association with the college races.

"The great difference in class between the teams was underlined by the fact that of the nine events run, U.C.D. were only successful in two". Janet Grainger jumped a winner, both long and high, the 71 feet thrown by Miss C. Hunter in the javelin was good enough to gain Trinity another first as was her discus.

At Shawbridge in Belfast, Trinity Ladies again took the Intervarsity title — another major win in one year which made it three in 1973. The captain Caroline Fitzgerald was placed high in both discus and shot putt. Patricia Moran kept her reputation by winning the 100 metres in 12.3 seconds and the 200 metres in 27.8 seconds. The jumpers were J. Lynberg and J. Grainger who together took the top two places in their events and the still U.C.G. Jean Folan won both the 400 and 800 metres.

The training must have slackened for the following year. Trinity had no winners at the Intervarsities but Patricia Moran, 1974 team captain, just got the team together for the colours match pipping U.C.D. to the post by a lucky 60 points to 57.

Perhaps Patricia had her mind on improving the relations between the then separate mens and ladies athletics clubs in Trinity. At the 1975 AGM, it was agreed that the ladies athletics was to be included in any scheme applying to the mens club. Times were changing — mixed training and mixed teams were in the production line. However, the clubs were still separate entities, together in all but in name.

It was the proposal by Eleanor Lamb in 1976 on behalf of the ladies athletic club

that there might be an absolute amalgamation of the mens and ladies clubs — the details of the proposal were that there be an overall committee comprising of a club chair, secretary, treasurer with mens and womans captains and other representatives from both clubs. This was to be run strictly on a one year basis. Siobhan Lonergan was the first ladies captain of the newly amalgamated club. Jane Lyons being the womans representative — ladies were now to be recognised for the pinks award, based on a high standard of performance.

Led by Siobhan Lonergan (now Mrs. Tracey), the Trinity girls took third place at the Intervarsities with Patricia Moran making a strong performance in the sprints. Siobhan herself a middle distance runner gained team points in the 1500 metres just beating Mary Friel by 6/10ths of a second. Again, the 4x100 metres relay team was in winning form. “A particularly successful day for host team Trinity when they just failed to made a clean sweep of the four relay events having won the other three, they looked certain to take the ladies 4x400 metres when Veronica Keane went on to the final leg with a lead of 30 yards — Mary Doyle (U.C.C.) closed up on to the Trinity girl on the back straight but Miss Keane held on and was still in the lead with only five metres. Miss Doyle however touched the tape first to win although T.C.D. recorded the same time” — Irish Times 1977. U.C.C. were the 1977 Intervarsity champions.

Veronica was again pipped at the post in the 400 metres colours race in College Park which T.C.D. won by an overall of 10 points. Patricia Moran improved her personal best in the 200 metres by 1.3 seconds and again won both sprints. The captain, Siobhan, made an unusual appearance on the field, throwing the javelin and getting third place after she equalled the colours match record. She won the 800 metres in 221.5 seconds as well as the 1500 metres in 454 seconds.

It was time for a club tour. The amalgamated club was to visit Holland in June 1978. Veronica Keane was again not quite quick enough — I quote here from the amusing minutes of the tour: “The party totalled twenty-one: sixteen fellows and five girls. These odds could have been better but for the misfortune of Veronica Keane who missed the plane and thus the tour”. The results and times indicate that the Trinity athletes were having a good time in the red light city — they did manage to come second overall in a triangle between R. U. Ulrecht and V. U. Amsterdam. A nice break was had by all!

Third again in the '78 Intervarsities, Siobhan Lonergan, Hilary Smith, Gretta Hickey and Jane Lynham ('78 ladies captain) performed well. However, Trinity ladies were more successful in the cross-country event when Siobhan came first.

“There were scenes of wild ecstasy, uncontrolled emotion and uninhibited delirium when T.C.D. beat U.C.G. recently. U.C.G. had not been beaten for the last six years in an Intervarsity cross country race. Their victory banquet

planned for the Gresham hotel had to be cancelled, Trinity celebrating with their usual banquet of cheese sandwiches and beer.”

- Newsletter '78.

1979–1985

By 1979, the ladies of D.U.H.A.C. had clearly demonstrated that their function in the club was no longer to serve sandwiches to the “athletic heros” of the day, but that they in their own right were heroines. This was particularly true of the Harriers who between the years of 1969 and 1979 had taken eight of the individual titles over the gruelling two mile course at the Intervarsity cross country championships. By 1985, this number had increased to ten, and indeed two of these winners, Siobhan Lonergan and Mary Friel, later went on to represent their country at the world cross country championships. Apart from the excellent individual performances, Trinity also had strength in depth and there were some fine team wins. The team of '81, Etain Crossadell, Barbara Gill, B. Cornyn and K. O'Donnell packed extremely well to regain the title which Trinity had won the previous year, when finishing third, sixth, eighth and ninth respectively at the Intervarsity Championships. Trinity ladies had to wait three years to repeat this performance — when in 1984, Mary Friel, Jean Folan, Ann Brady and Lotte Cantly narrowly defeated the U.C.D. team at these Championships in Santry.

The Harriers athlete, also faired well on the track. Gretta Hickey who had won two cross country titles scored well in both 1500 metres and 3000 metres events for college. Having won the 3000 metre Intervarsity title in 1978, she added a colours 1500 metres title to her list of achievements in 1979, when Trinity, captained by Jane Lynham, notched up an easy victory against U.C.D. to win 75 to 53. The colours match of that year saw the college long jump record being broken when Margaret Worrall leaped a distance of 5.12 metres to take the title. Other fine performances include those of Cathy Llewellyn who won the 400 metres and 800 metres, and Sheena Conroy winning the shot and discus.

Plassey, Limerick was the venue for the Intervarsities of 1981. The ladies team, fresh from their victory over the country were anticipating some fine performances on the track. Their captain, Etain Crossadell, paved the way, in winning the 800 metres in 2.19.8 and finishing second in the 400 metres. Margo Quinn followed suit by taking the sprint double in 12.5 and 26.5 respectively. Fionnuala Kennedy gained maximum points in the high jump. However, in spite of these fine performances, Thomond College with a strong team and home support held off the challenge of T.C.D. to take the trophies.

The ladies team of 1982 slipped one place in the results of both cross country and track and field Intervarsity championships. Jean Folan was the first girl home in the two

mile event at Maynooth in fourth place, while on the track at the equivalent championships in College Park, Margo Quinn repeated her sprint double of the previous year. Fionnuala Kennedy was our only other winner of the day, taking the high jump title with a height of 1.63 metres. The College Races of that year saw the defeat of Margaret Worrall by captain Mary Condon. Ms. Condon leaped a distance of 4.90 metres to gain victory over the record holder who was 8 cms behind.

Post-graduate student, Mary Friel, who had competed for U.C.D. in the late seventies took her first title over the country in March 1983, in a thrilling battle with Roisin Smith of U.C.D. The following year however, Ms. Smith was to gain revenge at the same event in Santry. On the track, later that same year, Mary Friel took the 3000 metres Intervarsity title in Belfast. Team performance at this competition was poor due to the poor turnout of Trinity's ladies. Our only other victory of the day was that achieved by Junior Freshman, Mary Nolan in the 200 metres. Overall, this season was a disappointing one with few ladies competing due to exam pressures.

But, this lull in the ladies team did not last for long. As if to make up for the poor show of the previous year, the team turned out in their numbers to prove their strength. The year began modestly enough with a meet in Belfast with Junior Freshman, Lotte Cantly, taking the laurels at a cross country event. The team however were beaten into second place by their Northern counterparts. The next cross country outing was the Intervarsity championships in Santry, where Trinity, with its full strength team took the trophy. The following day, a venue many miles away in Holland was the scene for Trinity's next victory. Here, the ladies won well from the Dutch girls.

This was a most unusual year for Trinity's athletes for within the space of one week, we were finishing the last cross country race of the year and beginning the track season. The ladies coped well. winning on the track against Wageringen and Enschede.

Back in Ireland however, pre-varsity meets yielded poor results with losses against Limerick A.C. and Thomond College. However, all athletes were preparing for an assault on the Intervarsity Trophy. Trinity's ladies were hoping to achieve the double for the first time i.e. to win both cross country and track and field championships. Belfield was the venue for this event, and U.C.D. on home ground were keen to repeat their victory of the previous year. Good all round performances from the girls from Trinity put a stop to their plans. Dara Shakespeare competing in the three throwing events notched up wanted points for the club — and won the javelin easily to take her first Intervarsity title. Mary Friel, although losing her 3000 metres to Fionnuala Morrish, in finishing second, won the 1500 metres to gain maximum points for Trinity. The 400 metres was an exciting race with team captain Mary Nolan and Ann Brady battling their way against each other in the home straight. Ms. Brady won eventually in 58.2 seconds. Ms. Nolan failed to regain her title of 1983 in the 200 metres, finishing second also whilst Margaret Downes in the hurdles did well to come second to Noelle Morrissey

of U.C.C. The relay events decided the overall result and with T.C.D. finishing second in both 4x100 metres and 4x400 metres, secured enough points to take the championship trophy.

And so to the present year, that of 1985. The girls, invigorated by their success put in some fine individual performances both on track and field, and cross country. Mary Clark, in her first race for Trinity, took the colours cross country title but through injury missed much of last year, but having recovered now, anticipates some good races. The Intervarsity in Cork was the venue for some record-breaking performances. In all, T.C.D. athletes broke four of the Intervarsity records. Junior Freshman, Patricia Walsh had an excellent run in the 200 metres, winning in a record time of 24.6 seconds. Later, she ran a blistering leg of the relay assisting the team to break the 4x400 metres relay in 3.55.8 — Dara Shakespeare smashed the javelin record with a throw of 48.1 metres — and in battle again were Ann Brady and Mary Nolan in the 400 metres hurdle with the latter winning on this occasion with a record time of 63.5 seconds. At the end of the day, these performances were not enough to win the team event and T.C.D. finished in second place behind U.C.D.

The centenary season yet awaits us, and with all our record breaking athletes still in college we are hoping for a successful year. Today, barring the triple-jump and pole-vault, women are certainly free to do what they choose in athletics. No longer is their role solely to serve teas to the male competitors. Unlike their counterparts in the thirties, women athletes now have freedom of choice as to whether or not they shall participate. The choice is there — the rest is up to them.



Figure 15: Back Row (l-r): Jean Folan, Mary Nolan, Fionnula Kennedy, Mary Friel, Anne Brady.
Front Row (l-r) Dara Shakespeare, Mary Ryan, Lotte Cantley, Margaret Downes, Eimear McAnnally,
Deirdre Ni Cheallochainn.

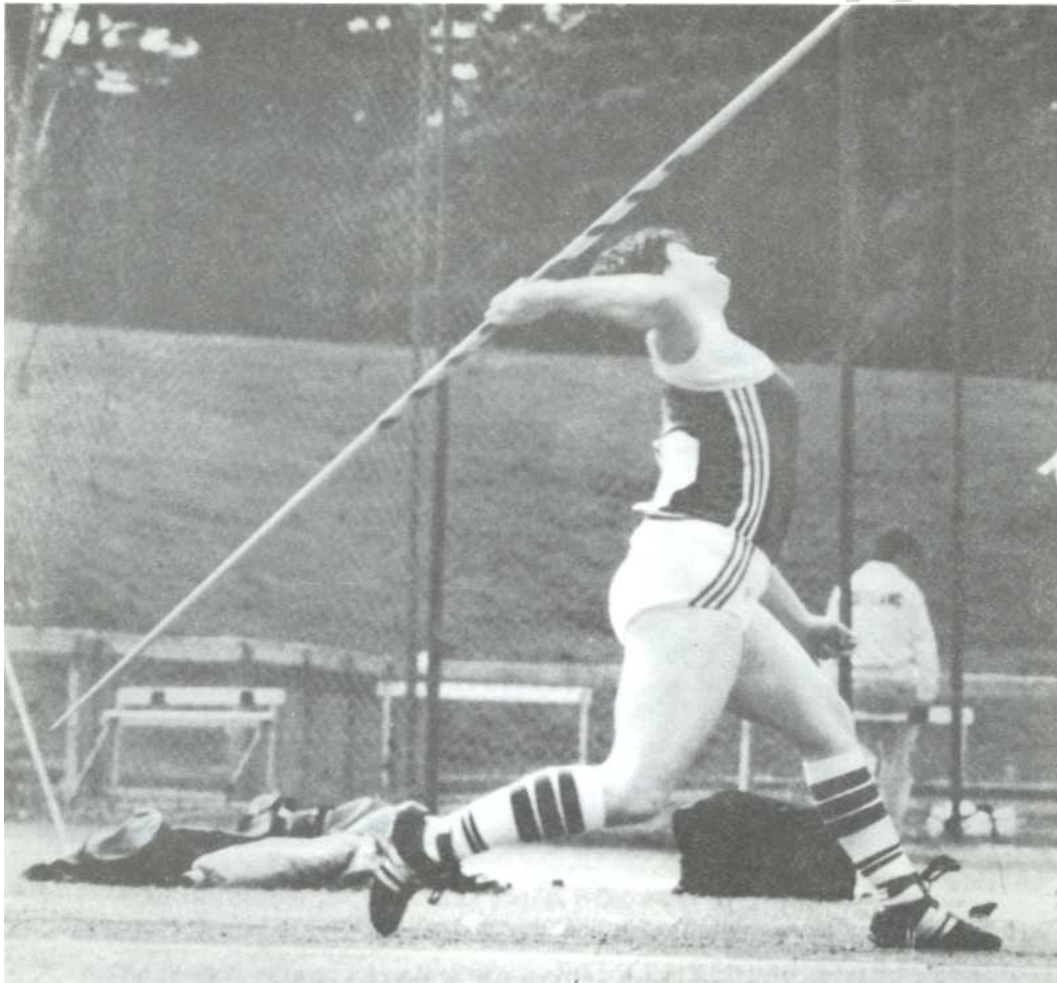


Figure 16: Dara Shakespeare



Figure 17: The start of the “Swinging Sixties” in College Park — the novelty walkers in their stride, 1960.